

**Senate Select Committee on Prison Safety**  
**Monday, April 1, 2019 at 3:00 PM**  
**Room 544 of the Legislative Office Building**

**MINUTES**

The Senate Select Committee on Prison Safety met at 3:00 PM on April 1, 2019 in Room 544 of the Legislative Office Building. Senators present were Harper Peterson, Ralph Hise, Norman Sanderson, Jim Burgin, Joyce Waddell, Floyd McKissick, Tom McInnis, Kathy Harrington

Senator Bob Steinburg presided.

Senator Steinburg recognized Sergeants at Arms Michael Caviness and Linda Matthews.

Senator Sanderson moved the minutes of March 25, 2019 be approved with Senator Burgin seconding. The minutes were approved with no objection.

Senator Steinburg announced a slightly different format for the meeting as we were discussing a series of questions related to recruitment and retention, which are in bold below.

**How long employed as a Corrections Officers before receiving the benefit of children receiving scholarships?**

Senator Burgin stated community college waivers are possible, such as what is used by Campbell University employees, whose children automatically eligible for waivers in the Community College system. As to the University system waivers, he would need to see what the fiscal impact would be.

Senator Hise suggested that it might be better to focus education opportunities for the employees as a means of upward career mobility.

Senator Peterson stated that the question “what would a career path for Corrections Officer look like,” and stated that a living wage should be the first consideration.

Senator McKissick stated that talking directly to actual correctional officers would give us direct line to evaluate what is important. He also suggested that it would perhaps be better to focus most on compensation with a differential for facilities that are hard to recruit for, as well as a better compensation package.

Senator Steinburg reminded the committee that we are simply in a discussion stage, and that the big challenge is not just trying to keep the corrections officers that we currently have, and how do we attract new ones.

Senator Sanderson asked the average age of a correctional officer. The number might be very narrow with respect to officers with college age children. He also suggested using a model like

Teaching Fellows that offer scholarships in exchange for a promise of a number of years of service.

Senator Waddell asked if some study was done. She also stated that if the corrections officers stated they wanted a benefit, the question of cost would need to be answered, how far reaching in terms of tuition, books, and room and board would be afforded the students through these scholarships.

Senator McInnis stated that the problem seems to be a management issue. He referenced a CO2 telling the Senator that he was told to work the guard house, but must be a CO3, although the supers won't pay raise to CO3. He stated that this is an indication of correctional officers not being treated like professionals, as they should be.

Senator Harrington referenced the criminal justice fellows program that would let one come out with two year degree, and wondered if such a program could be set up for correctional officers. She also suggested a sign on bonus for x-number of years as a potential recruitment tool.

Senator McKinnis asked if there was a breakdown of the per prison vacancy rate? Mr. John Poteat will get that information to the committee.

Senator Peterson asked if there have been recommendations from Kenneth Lassiter on how we can make improvements.

### **8 Hour Shifts vs. 12 Hour Shifts**

Senator Burgin stated that employees should have both options. Some like 12 hour shifts because they can have secondary employment or have their own businesses, as well as the flexibility to spend time with families.

Senator Hise stated that most correctional officers believe 12 hours benefit so that they can do personal things at home, spend time with family and also wondered if we risking more confusion with three shift changes per day as opposed to two.

Senator Harrington stated that flexibility, custody level, input from the Department of Corrections, safety, and best practices should be the guide in making any changes.

Senator McInnis stated that while correctional officers are generally fine with the 12 hour shifts, but the problem is when they are asked to work more than the twelve hours.

Senator Steinburg asked Director of Prisons Kenneth Lassiter how often are correctional officers are being asked to work beyond the twelve hours that they are scheduled to work. Mr. Lassiter stated that it happens more often than the department would like to happen, given the vacancy rate of 18%. Senator Steinburg followed up by asking if officers are asked to work beyond 16 hours. Mr. Lassiter stated that it has happened in isolated cases, but efforts are made to get the correctional officers home as quickly as possible.

Senator McKissick stated that he could see a mix of eight hour and twelve hour shifts based on the level of custody where close custody correctional officers would work 8 hour shifts, stressing that while some might see a benefit of working 12 hours, not all correctional officers would.

Senator Peterson stated that while he appreciates the 12 hour shift attractiveness, but understands that the standard in society is an 8-9 hour workday, and has not seen any data showing long-term benefits of working 12-14 hour shifts in a high stress job.

Senator Sanderson stated that 12 hours is a long time for a child to be at daycare or with non-parental relatives. The biggest issue is the number of personnel available to work three eight hours shifts versus two twelve hour shifts in a day.

Senator Waddell asked if there was a study that has been done to see the comparisons between the 8 and 12 hour shifts. Had there been a discussion with correctional officers across the board to examine the advantages and disadvantages.

### **Recruitment and Retention Bonuses**

Senator McInnis stated there is a need to be offer competitive incentives. If we are to be competitive, considering the low unemployment, we must do what is necessary to recruit correctional officers, especially in the urban areas.

Senator McKissick stated his support for some sort of narrowly tailored incentive, and that we should not necessarily offer them across the board. The other question is do we offer little at the front end with much more at the back end of a period of time. He also stated that bonuses should be pared with a better pay structure.

Senator Waddell suggested bonuses as people increase their educational levels. She also suggested a sign-on bonus to make recruitment attractive, and would support offering longevity bonuses at five years rather than ten.

Senator Sanderson stated he believed that pinpointed bonus needs to be considered, especially in the higher risk facilities, namely close custody facilities.

Senator Peterson stated that a bonus should not be a given, but rather awarded for actions above and beyond the call of duty.

Senator Harrington stated that if bonus were offered, it is important to consider how it's structured, and should also include with a restructuring of the pay scale.

Senator Hise stated that he could support the idea re-enlistment bonuses like in the military, where the bonuses are broken up in various phases in a year. He also mentioned the idea of merit bonuses as well as a possible annual bonus given just before Thanksgiving.

Senator Burgin suggested doing performance evaluations as often as possible and having a bonus schedule based around those evaluations.

Senator McInnis stated that he had received a “by-unit” vacancy rate, where the vacancies in the various prisons range from 1% to 56%, mentioning that the Southern Correctional Institution has the 56% vacancy rate. Mr. Poteat stated that the facility is going through a re-missioning project, and there is staffed being moved around, essentially distorting the vacancy rate. Mr. Lassiter stated Mr. Poteat was correct about Southern, Lanesboro, and Eastern were all going through re-missioning projects.

#### **STEP PAY PLAN SIMILAR TO THE HIGHWAY PATROL**

Senator Hise thinks there are options for STEP plan (important for someone to go into a career to reach max pay in their field.), but stressed that those steps should be front loaded, such as the Highway Patrol where a trooper can reach maximum pay in six years. He also stated that should be true especially in areas where there are few promotion opportunities.

Senator Burgin also stated if a STEP is looked at, it should be considered that not all correctional officers want to be managers. If they are continuing to pursue excellence, the rewards should follow.

Senator Sanderson stated that pretty comprehensive plan is needed to allow quick move up the ladder.

Senator Waddell stated that a STEP plan is important, and also stated that we should look at existing STEP plans as models. It’s also important to ask correctional officers to find out what they want.

Senator McKissick stated that a STEP plan makes sense, but needs to be well thought out.

Next meeting on April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019 at 3:00 p.m.

The meeting adjourned at 4:15 p.m..

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Select or Type Name of Presiding Chair  
Presiding

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Edward Stiles, Committee Clerk